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Anesthesia and Pain Management
services to veterinary patients
throughout the Colorado Front Range**

**Client Care Brochure
Veterinary Anesthesia**

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Introduction

Anesthesia is scary for most pet owners. Some fears are justified, but most are eased once you understand what happens to your pet when it is anesthetized by a board certified anesthesiologist.

It is important to understand that there are real risks of complications related to anesthesia and surgery. However, an anesthesiologist's goal is to manage those risks and reduce the potential of complications to the lowest level reasonably possible. You can help your anesthesiologist perform this task if you remember a few simple things and actively participate in making health care decisions for your pet.

1. Ask Questions

When you consent to anesthesia for your pet you are agreeing to assume the risks inherent in any anesthetic procedure. You should understand what the potential risks and benefits are when your pet undergoes anesthesia and related surgical procedures. If you have any questions or concerns you should query your veterinarian or anesthesiologist until you are satisfied. A face-to-face meeting with the anesthesiologist is not always required, but most anesthesiologists would be happy to meet with you and discuss any concerns you have. Telephone consultations are also able to answer many questions.

2. Provide a Complete History

Many decisions about what anesthetic drugs and techniques will be used depend on the information that you provide about the current and past health problems experienced by your pet. Previous experiences with anesthesia are particularly important. Don't assume your veterinarian knows the whole history about the health of your pet. Especially if you have changed veterinary clinics or you are seeing a different doctor in the same practice. All current medications, vaccinations, and health problems should be disclosed. Over-the-counter medications in particular should be mentioned since some like aspirin can significantly interact with some anesthetic and analgesic drugs commonly used.

If your pet had a previous anesthetic, it is often useful to know if things went well, or if there were problems. Common problems include prolonged sedation following the procedure or undesirable excitement or anxiousness associated with analgesics. While some degree of behavior change is not unusual for 12-24 hours following anesthesia, you should immediately inform your veterinarian if you think something is wrong.

3. Follow Directions

Your veterinarian should give you a list of things to do for your pet for the 24 hours prior to anesthesia and surgery. The specific directions will vary from clinic to clinic, and with the procedure being performed.

However, there are some common guidelines that are often given for healthy patients undergoing elective procedures. 1) Do not feed your pet solid food after 10 pm the night before anesthesia. Water is usually okay. This is to reduce the amount of food in the animal's stomach and reduce the risk of aspiration of gastric contents in the perioperative period. Very young animals and diabetic animals are common exceptions to this guideline and you should consult your veterinarian about your pet's care. 2) If your animal is on medication at home, find out if it should be given the day of surgery or if it needs to be discontinued. Many medications do not interact with anesthetics or cause problems during surgery. However, some drugs such as aspirin are often discontinued several days before surgery to reduce bleeding. Other drugs should not be stopped before anesthesia, especially cardiovascular and anticonvulsant drugs, because they can cause unwanted changes in the patient's condition. The most important thing to do is notify your veterinarian or anesthesiologist of ALL drugs and supplements your pet is taking and ask whether they should be given the day of anesthesia. 3) Have fun with your pet. Stress and anxiety are often unavoidable, but try to reduce them as much as possible, for both you and your pet.

4. Keep in Touch

It is common for questions to arise during anesthesia and surgery which need to be answered in a timely manner to allow optimal

care of your pet. These questions are often related to patient history, your treatment choices, but may also include decisions about how to proceed when something unexpected happens.

It is important to provide several possible contact numbers that can be used to reach you during surgery. Cell phones have made communication much easier, but occasionally cell phone numbers do not work unexpectedly. Your veterinarian may want you to wait at the clinic during anesthesia so you can be quickly reached to make decision. You should inquire with your veterinarian how they want you to proceed when you bring your pet in.

5. Declare Your Wishes

It is often an uncomfortable subject to discuss for both clients and veterinary care providers, but it is extremely important your wishes are known in advance should something catastrophic occur during anesthesia or surgery. Most clinics will ask you if you want CPR or DNR if something terrible were to happen. CPR stands for *Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation* and can be performed externally or internally. External CPR is non-invasive and is performed whenever your wishes are not known in advance. Internal CPR is much more invasive and involves entering the chest. This technique is not commonly performed, but should be considered for extremely large dogs, or animals that have diseases affecting the heart or chest cavity.

DNR stands for *Do Not Resuscitate* and means that should your pet's heart stop during the procedure; no efforts will be made to restart it. This option is sometimes chosen for pets with terminal diseases.

Summary

When your pet requires anesthesia you should feel like you have had all your questions answered and that you are able to provide informed consent. Communication with your veterinary care provider is the key to assuring you are comfortable with your decisions and that your veterinarian or anesthesiologist has all the information they need to provide the best care possible to your pet.

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